

Remarks

Reconsideration of the application and allowance of all pending claims are respectfully requested. Claims 1-9 remain pending.

Initially, the Office Action requested a corrected amendment to FIG. 1. In response, applicant has submitted herewith a replacement drawing sheet for FIG. 1 that includes labels for boxes 10 and 14, and complies with revised 37 C.F.R. 1.121(d). A marked-up copy showing changes to FIG. 1 is also submitted herewith. Based upon this amendment, applicant respectfully requests withdrawal of the drawings objection stated in the Office Action dated November 20, 2002.

Substantively, claims 1-9 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Bapat et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,236,996; hereinafter, "Bapat") in view of Celik (U.S. Patent No. 6,374,259). Applicant respectfully, but most strenuously, traverses this rejection for the reasons below.

An "obviousness" determination requires an evaluation of whether the prior art taken as a whole would suggest the claimed invention taken as a whole to one of ordinary skill in the art. In evaluating claimed subject matter as a whole, the Federal Circuit has expressly mandated that functional claim language be considered in evaluating a claim relative to the prior art. Applicants respectfully submit that the application of these standards to the independent claims presented herewith leads to the conclusion that the recited subject matter would not have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art based on the applied patents.

Applicant recites a technique for controlling access to data to be used in common by multiple users (e.g., claim 1). The technique includes data storage for storing the data in common and an access management table that includes access management data to control an access right to the data in common. The technique also includes a control means for automatically updating the access management data in the access management table, concurrent with and in response to transmitting a communication from a first user to a second user. The communication includes reference information to the data to be used in common and the first user is authorized to grant to the second user an access right to the data. The second user is

granted the access right to the data pursuant to the automatic updating of the access management data responsive to the transmitting of the communication.

Advantageously, applicant's recited technique allows one communication (e.g., an e-mail) from a first user to a second user that (1) includes reference information (e.g., ID of data to be accessed, ID of user who is permitted access, and permission level required to access the data to be used in common) and (2) automatically and concurrently updates access management data (i.e., automatically and concurrently grants an access right to the second user). In comparison, conventional techniques provide these two functionalities in separate, non-concurrent operations (e.g., granting an access right to access data prior to providing reference information required to access that data). Thus, the present invention provides data access control in an easy operation that improves efficiency of the access control process by avoiding the need for an authorized user or database manager to update an access management table in advance of communicating reference information.

Bapat describes a database access technique that uses a permissions table to specify access rights to managed objects (see Title and Abstract thereof). These access rights are determined by access control rules derived from an access control database that specifies users' access rights to sets of managed objects (see Abstract and col. 26, lines 10-59). After these access rights are stored, a user requests access to management data in a database using the access rights specified by the permissions table. This scheme of accessing data fits exactly into the realm of conventional access techniques described above, and stands in stark contrast to the present invention.

For example, applicants recite automatically updating the access management data in the access management table concurrent with the transmission of a communication that includes reference information to the data to be used in common. In contrast, Bapat discloses no such concurrency. Instead, the access control database and permissions table in Bapat are updated when access rights are stored prior to issuance and processing of a user access request that includes reference information (see, e.g., steps 1602, 1610 & 1612 of FIG. 16A, which indicate the lack of concurrency and step 244 of FIG. 6, which indicates reference information in the access request).

Further, applicant's invention recites the second user being granted the access right to the data pursuant to the automatic updating of the access management data responsive to the transmitting of the communication (i.e., the communication that includes the reference information to the data to be used in common). In comparison, as described above, the granting of access rights by database updates in Bapat is done before reference information is transmitted in a communication (i.e., before a user access request is issued and processed). Since such database updates in Bapat are done prior to the transmission of the reference information, they cannot be done in response to transmitting a communication that includes the reference information.

In the Office Action, Bapat is cited as teaching the above-described concurrency feature of the present invention at col. 15, line 67 – col. 16, line 7. This section of Bapat describes the updates of local copies of access control trees as occurring “virtually simultaneously” across multiple servers. Applicant respectfully submits that one update of a local copy of an access control tree being concurrent with another update of another local copy of such a tree is not descriptive or suggestive of an automatic update of access management data being concurrent with the transmission of a communication from a first user to a second user that includes reference information to the data to be used in common, as recited by the present invention.

The Office Action also cited col. 16, lines 55-61 relative to the above-noted concurrency feature. This cited section discloses a user communications interface by which insert statements and read requests are submitted. Applicant respectfully submits Bapat does not teach, suggest or imply that these statements or requests are transmitted concurrently with any other operation, let alone with the automatic updating of access management data, as recited by the present invention.

Based on the foregoing, applicant respectfully submits that Bapat does not teach, suggest or imply multiple features of applicant's claimed invention.

Celik, like Bapat, fits into the conventional access control process described above, and thus also lacks any teaching, suggestion or implication of multiple features of the present invention.

Celik describes information management technique for storing and retrieving business contact information stored in an internet-accessible database. The information management technique includes assigning a first user a unique user identification number, storing information related to the first user in a remote database, and enabling a second user to access the remote database over a network to retrieve information relative to the first user by entering the unique user identification number (see Abstract thereof). Prior to assigning the unique user identification number to the first user, the user's account preferences are set up, which include various grants of access to the first user's information (see FIG. 5 and col. 6, line 35 – col. 7, line 15).

In Celik, reference information is passed to a second user by means of the unique identification number of the first user (e.g., by including the identification number on a business card passed from the first user to the second user). It is clear that the unique identification number is not even assigned until after account preferences are set up (col. 7, lines 21-23). Since the setup of account preferences includes various grants of access to the information related to the first user (see FIG. 5 and col. 6, line 35 – col. 7, line 15), applicants submit that like Bapat, Celik grants access rights by database updates prior to (i.e., not concurrently with) the transmission of reference information. Thus, Celik lacks a teaching, suggestion or implication of the concurrency feature of the present invention described above.

Moreover, like Bapat, since the grant of access in Celik occurs before the transmission of reference information, the granting of the access right cannot be done pursuant to an automatic updating of access data responsive to the transmission of the above-described communication. Thus, applicant's recited manner of granting the access right to the second user is not taught, suggested or implied by Celik.

For the reasons stated above, applicants respectfully submit that Celik, like Bapat, fails to teach, suggest or imply at least the above-described concurrency feature and the granting of an access right to data to be used in common pursuant to automatic updating of access management data responsive to the transmission of the above-noted communication.

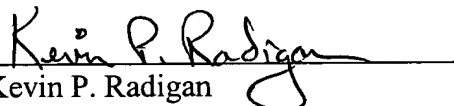
For all the above reasons, applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and withdrawal of the §103(a) rejection of independent claims 1 & 8. The dependent claims are believed

patentable for the same reasons as the independent claims from which they directly or ultimately depend, as well as for their own additional characterizations.

All the claims are believed to be in condition for allowance and such action is respectfully requested.

Should the Examiner wish to discuss this case with applicant's attorney, the Examiner is invited to contact applicant's representative at the below-listed number.

Respectfully submitted,


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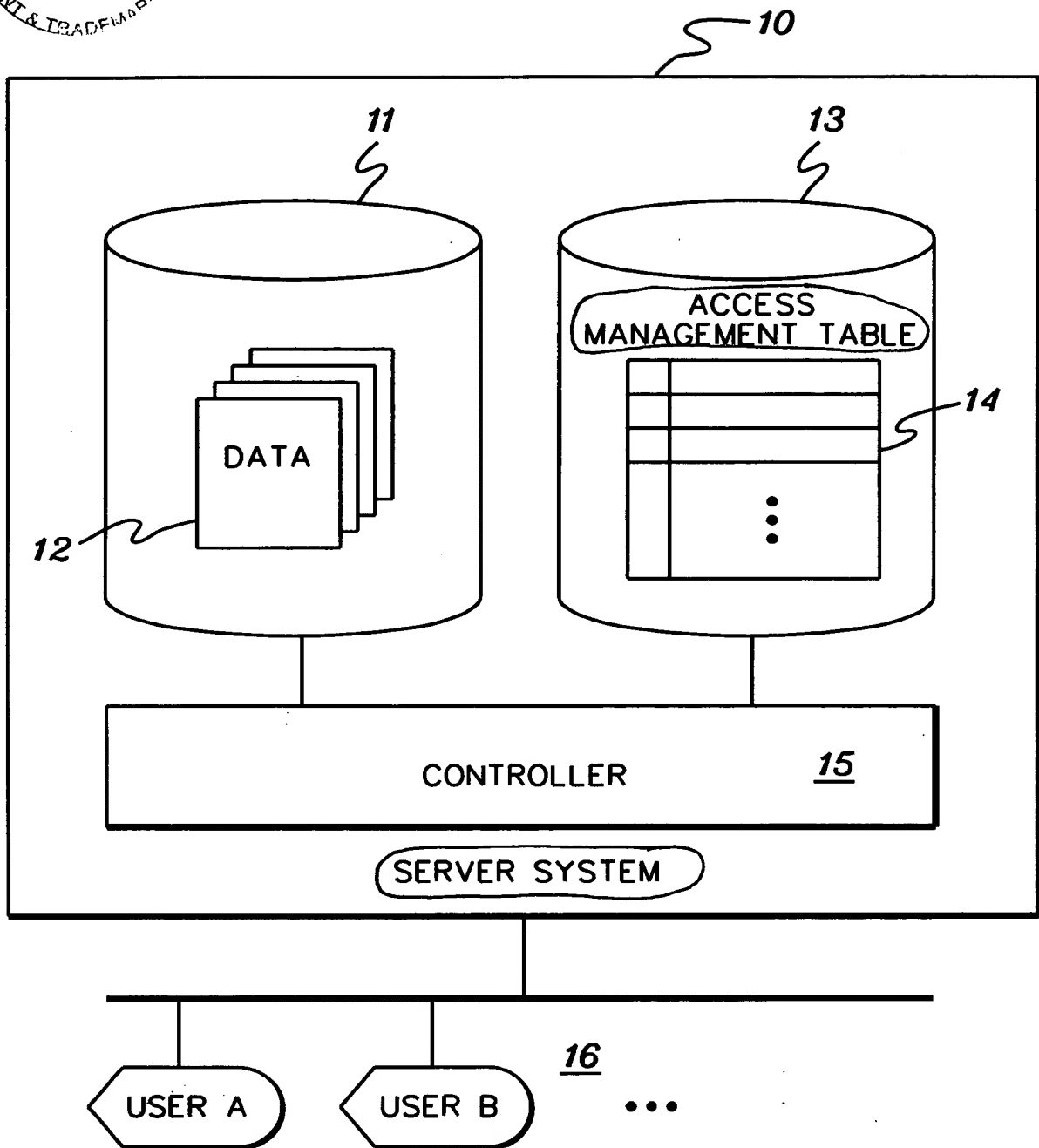


fig. 1